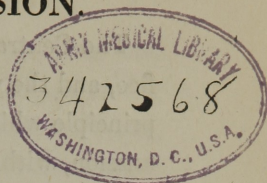


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U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 63.



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A LETTER TO THE WOMEN OF THE NORTHWEST,
ASSEMBLED AT THE FAIR AT CHICAGO, FOR
THE BENEFIT OF THE U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION.

NEW YORK, Oct. 29, 1863.

Mrs. R. H. HOGE,

Mrs. D. V. LIVERMORE,

and others :

Ladies,—I have received your kind invitation to attend the Fair held in your wonderful city on the closing week of October and the first week of November; and, later, your call to the Dinner to be given by the ladies of the North-Western Fair, on the 5th November—at which the governors of the States are expected as guests. I have been hoping to indulge myself in the pleasure of meeting the marvellous hive of industrious and patriotic women, to whose love and labor is due the honey that has sweetened the lot of so many suffering soldiers in this war. I do not wholly despair of it yet. I would sacrifice all ordinary or extraordinary business, to meet you face to face; the only thing I cannot sacrifice is the claim of dying parishioners who bind me to their bed-sides at this moment with the sacred cords of duty and affection. If these are broken by Divine Providence, I shall be with you on the 5th of November. But, lest I should not come, I have determined to send a messenger to you, to bear the expressions of my profoundest sympathy in your work, to thank you for the past energy you have displayed in the Northwest—that miracle of our generation!—and to tell you how dear and sacred to us are the bonds which unite us in our great common undertaking.

The Central Board has watched the patriotism, the self-sacrifice, and the unwearied fidelity of the Northwest, to the federal principle which animates the work of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, with the utmost admiration. They know full well that you are a people complete in your own resources, independent in your spirit, and capable of controlling your own concerns. They know, too, how natural it is for a region so vast and strong as yours, to assert its independence, and even refuse to mix in its lot with other and far-distant sections of the country. What, then, has been its gratitude, in recognizing that your devotion to the principles of Union and Nationality, was such that you could sacrifice local feelings and the consciousness of your complete independence, to the desire to mingle your spirit and your work with that of your sister States, however distant; to swell the federal principle, at the hour when it is threatened by political rebels, with the tides of womanly fidelity, and make up for all the losses it has suffered at men's hands, by the free offerings of women's hearts? The noble temper of Nationality maintained in the Northwest, equally in its political and military movements, and its benevolent operations, but nowhere more manifest than in the whole history of your vigorous Branch of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, is one of the chief securities of our perfect triumph over all the disintegrating influences which have threatened to make the grand loaf of the Union, a basket of crumbs. Thank God! the Northwest does not mean to put her wheat into any such beggar's wallet. She will bake it into the biggest batch of Union-bread the world ever saw, and invite all honest hearts from all oppressed nations, to come and eat at her hospitable board, beneath the glorious Stars and Stripes of a vast American nationality. I believe a great deal more in human instincts, than in human reasonings. I believe, therefore, more in the *people* of this country, than in the politicians and editors and thinkers, because the people follow their instincts, which are divinely implanted, while the would-be lead-

ers follow their theories and their guesses, or their fears and hopes. It is the great drift of the *people's hearts* that is saving the nation—and the Government are merely careful raftsmen, some of them happily accustomed to flat-boats, who float on a current they do not make, are subject to freshets they do not expect, and are only capable of steering and keeping afloat what receives its main direction and its speed, and has its pre-ordained destination, from other and irresistible sources! But most of all, I trust the *women* of this country, because of all its people they are most controlled by their instincts; which are purer, holier, and better than those of men. The women of America have the filial instinct toward their country, in a form and degree as marked as their maternal instinct for their own children. They have shown a holy passion for the preservation of the nation in its absolute wholeness. They have given their husbands, their sons, their lovers and brothers, with a generous abnegation of all their own interests, to the army and the cause, with a heroism that cannot be surpassed even by those they have sent, many of whom have already sanctified the soil which rebels had polluted, with their own blood, and all of whom stand prepared to re-baptize and re-claim it with their heart's gore. This passion, not content with giving up the bread-winners, the pride and joy and stay of their homes, has led the women of the land to take the snowy quilts and blankets from their beds, the curtains from their windows, the hoarded linen from their presses, and send it in avalanches of comfort to our storehouses of relief. The women have considered themselves as at a great national quilting-party; the States so many patches, each of its own color or stuff, the boundaries of the nation the frame of the work; and *at it* they have gone, with needles and busy fingers, and their very heart-strings for thread, and sewed and sewed away, adding square to square, and row to row; allowing no piece or part to escape their plan of Union; until the territorial area of the loyal States is all of a piece, first tacked and basted, then sewed and stitched by women's

hands, wet often with women's tears, and woven in with women's prayers; and now at length you might truly say the National Quilt—all striped and starred—will tear anywhere sooner than in the seams, which they have joined in a blessed and inseparable unity!

Is not the U. S. Sanitary Commission the woman's plea for nationality?—the expression of their instinctive determination to have an undivided country? They have said in Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, in Rhode Island and Kentucky, in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, in Iowa and in Connecticut, in Michigan and Maine, We will know no East and no West, no middle and no sides. We have a common country; are fellow countrymen; are all *national* citizens; our troops all *national* soldiers; and we will work for them only *as such*. At other times and seasons unlike this, let state and local jealousies and sectional pride have their natural way; but not now! No! not now! Leave it to Southern traitors to first talk, and then *act* secession! Leave it to angry Copperheads and rebels in loyal disguises, to hiss division and breed disaffection and party and sectional animosities. We will give our sacred instincts of Union to the great cause of co-operative charity; of national relief to national distress; of national succor and comfort to national soldiers! And so the patriotic women all over the land have fallen in as by a Providential necessity, as by a true-hearted, disinterested, magnanimous spirit of love and sympathy, into the great common work, in which you, the Northwestern women assembled at this Fair, are now so gloriously and successfully engaged. And while you, with true western largeness, energy and invention, are conducting this immense enterprise with such marvellous spirit and success, remember that New England is just preparing, in a similar Fair, to exhibit her fidelity to the same principles and the same common cause, the U. S. Sanitary Commission; and that she does not mean to be

behind the noble example you, by a month's priority in time, will have the opportunity of setting her! Don't give her any excuse for raising, by her Fair, a dollar short of your mark—\$25,000!!! I don't believe that will turn out to be high-water mark in Chicago. I think there will be a 3 in the sum total of your labors! You have raised your streets to get out of the wet; you must lower your pockets to lift your Northwest reputation as high as your Eastern admirers fix it! We bid Boston prick up her ears when Chicago reports the result of the N. Western Fair.

Lest you should for an instant fancy that my words are sweetened by the hope of seeing some of your money in the general treasury of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, I beg here to disclaim either the expectation or desire of the Board for any such diversion of your funds into our central coffers. It would be a mere waste of time and transportation. While the store-houses of the Northwestern Branches are open to the cry of our Western Secretary, what interest have we in fingering the money which, if you did not yourselves, with a noble pride, raise for your own and for our ultimate use, we should have to raise for you? We are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars upon our western armies, from the central treasury. Every dollar you raise and every article you accumulate saves our treasury and our store-houses just so much. In God's name, go on! and the richer your local treasury and store-houses, the richer we are in the common work, which our united country—and especially our American women—are carrying on, through the U. S. Sanitary Commission.

Let me, through you, thank the women of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, for their incessant and most productive labors in this good and gracious work. Their sisters in the Middle States and in the East hail them with true family affection! I pray you guard, as the apple of your eye, this holy

oneness of plan and organization. Trample on the serpent that would tempt you out of this Paradise of national wholeness of heart and soul. Suspect all who seek to sow seeds of division and local rebellion; we have escaped it thus far almost entirely; only enough of that bitterness has entered into our common cup to make us beware of any more. To the generous, intelligent, and whole-hearted Northwest we look for a persistent support to the last. The nation has adopted the United States Sanitary Commission as its own work; a rampart of women's hearts protect it—a ring more sacred and inviolable than if it were a park of artillery. The time will surely come when the great uprising of the women of America,—nay, their systematic organization and co-operation in a common work, will be regarded as the most marked social feature of the war, the most splendid achievement on record of spontaneous humanity, the brightest augury of perpetual peace and unity in our Nation. May God give the Northwest a continuance of its faith and fervor in this cause! The blessing of the Almighty Father rests on the women of the Northwest, and on their pious endeavors to bind up the wounds of the national soldiers, and preserve, without seam, the spotless robe of our National Union.

Faithfully and affectionately yours,

HENRY W. BELLOWS,

President of the United States

Sanitary Commission.

P. S. I desire to commend to you and all our Northwestern friends and coadjutors, our minister plenipotentiary and extraordinary, charged with delivering in person this message from your President! He is our most tried and trusty Special Relief Agent, now also the head of the Eastern department, holding here precisely Dr. Newberry's place among you. No man, outside the Board itself, understands better than Mr. Knapp the spirit, the methods and the plans of the United States Sanitary Commission, and, in conjunction with our deeply honored fellow Commissioner, your efficient President, Hon. Mark Skinner, and Dr. Newberry, he is fully authorized to come to any understanding with the Northwestern branches which changes of circumstances may commend to the common judgment of our constituents. We know *no* occasion for *any* important changes in our machinery and relations. We are always glad, however, to hear of any new lessons which your local experience may be able to suggest for the common good.

H. W. B.